



Planning a Site Visit with Your Legislator

A visit to a property conserved with a state grant may help a legislator better understand the impact of state conservation investments.

Introduction 2

Getting Started 2

What Kind of a Site Visit Do You Want to Plan? 2

Inviting Your Legislator 3

Who Else to Invite? 3

The Day of the Event 4

Highlight the Benefits to the Community 4

Managing Multiple People 4

Keepsakes 4

Maps 4

Details 4

Capturing the Event 5

After the Event 5

Thank you 5

Follow Up with Staff 5

Media Coverage 5

Bringing Your Event to the Next Level 5

Media Alert 5

Contacting Reporters 6

Press Conference 6

Preparing for the Press Conference 6

At The Event 7

After the Event 8

Special Considerations During an Election Season 8

Disclaimer 9

Acknowledgements 9

Disclaimer 9

Introduction

Hosting legislators at properties your organization has conserved using state grants may help them to better understand the impact state conservation funding has in their communities and improve the chances that, in the future, they will support state conservation investments.

Getting Started

What Kind of a Site Visit Do You Want to Plan?

When planning a site visit, be creative. Brainstorm ideas but remain flexible and work with your legislator and his/her staff to create an event that fits everyone's needs. Keep in mind that your legislator may not have more than an hour or two for the event.

In choosing a site, consider what benefits of conservation you want to highlight, for example:

- *Public access for outdoor recreation.* Invite community members who are enjoying the resource to participate.
- *Water resource protection.* Explain how the property protects the community's water supply for residents and businesses
- *Farmland preservation.* Invite the legislator to try some of the food grown on the farm, such as freshly picked fruit, milk from a dairy farm, or something made from farm products, such as jam or cheese.

The visit could involve a simple walk or something more substantial, depending on the legislator's interests and the opportunities available, for example:

- A hike or bicycle tour;
- Hunting or fishing;
- A tour of a farming operation;
- Participation in an activity with your organization's volunteers, such as a tree planting or trail maintenance;
- Family friendly activities that the legislator can bring his/her children or grandchildren to;
- A celebration of the recent protection of the site or the anniversary of its protection; or
- A press conference where you publicly thank the legislator for supporting conservation.

When creating your event, remember to choose a site that provides the opportunity to tell a good story, is easily accessible, and will provide a good visual backdrop for the event. It is best (but not always essential) that the site is in the legislator's district. In order to reinforce the importance of future state conservation investments, the site ideally will have been conserved with state conservation funding.

Inviting Your Legislator

If you already have a relationship with your legislator, contact him/her directly to discuss the event and what he/she would like to see.

If you do not yet have a working relationship with your legislator, call their district office and ask who handles scheduling in the district. You will likely work with the legislator's staff at first, and may or may not end up talking with the legislator directly during the planning process. ([find your legislators' contact information](#))

You may be asked to put your request in writing. If this is the case, you can adapt this [sample invitation](#). In the request, include highlights of the planned event but emphasize your willingness to adapt the event content, duration and timing to the legislator's needs. Include pictures and maps; they are great motivational tools. You may still need to follow up with a phone call.

When choosing possible dates for the event, check the General Assembly's web page to see when the [representatives](#) and [senators](#) will be in Harrisburg, and when they will be in district. Be sure to invite and cultivate relationships with legislative staff. They can be important allies.

If you are planning the event with other organizations, it is helpful to identify one point of contact for the legislator's staff.

Who Else to Invite?

In addition to your legislator and his/her staff, you'll want to think strategically about whom to invite. You want your legislator to see the breadth of support for conservation but you don't want so many voices that the messages you wish to convey become muddled. Here are some participants to consider:

- *Owners* of the conserved land, particularly if they donated or bargain sold the land or conservation easement. While you may not be able to visit multiple properties, invite others who have conserved their land and highlight their personal stories, including pictures. Concentrate on landowners with compelling stories who can clearly articulate what preserving their land meant to them and how it is importance to their community.
- *Members of your board or staff who have a personal relationship with the legislator.* Mention them in your scheduling request.
- *Key partners.* This can be a great way to demonstrate the breadth of your support while thanking a partner for their engagement.
- *Local business owners that benefit from the conservation.* Invite members of the business community who can talk about the direct economic benefits of land conservation. For example: outdoor outfitters, a restaurant that serves visitors to the conserved land, a farm supply stores that serves preserved farms, or even a [local brewmaster](#) who can speak to the necessity of clean water for good beer.

The Day of the Event

Highlight the Benefits to the Community

While touring the site, you will want to let your legislator know why the conservation project is important and how state funding made it possible. Give tangible examples of how the community at large has benefited from the land being conserved. Examples of benefits include a new place for families to exercise and play together, securing a source of local food, protecting clean water, improving quality of life for community members and protecting the community's rural quality.

Do not use generalities; be specific about how your community has benefited. If possible, give details about the economic benefits of the project, such as the sales a farm generates, the number of visitors to a park or trail, or increased sales by nearby businesses.

If relevant, emphasize how state funding was able to leverage private, local and/or federal funding for the project.

Managing Multiple People

Although there may be multiple people at the site visit eager to share why the project is important, you don't want to overwhelm the legislator with too many people talking, or bore him/her with people repeating the same message. Develop a game plan to see this through. For example, choose one person to take the lead on presenting the information. This person can refer to others as appropriate, depending on their area of expertise or personal connection to the land.

Keepsakes

Providing a keepsake, like a framed print of the conserved land can be used to thank your legislator for their support and encourage future support. Tell them a story about the property and use the presentation as a photo-op.

Maps

Maps of the property and surrounding area can be a helpful way to start a tour. If possible, use a map of the area to show other preserved lands so that the legislator gets a sense of context. Keep maps simple. Legislators and their staff may not be as accustomed to looking at maps as you are and it can take time to acclimate to complex maps.

Details

Think through the event from the guests' point of view from beginning to end. Do they have clear directions, know what time to be there, and understand what kind of physical demands and clothing are required? (Remember that legislators are often coming from

and going to other events/meetings so they won't always be dressed for the outdoors.) Is parking clearly marked? Are there handouts you want the legislator and their staff to have? How about water, snacks, bug repellent, sunscreen, etc? Always know where the closest restroom facilities can be found.

Capturing the Event

Designate someone to take lots of pictures and take notes on the legislator's remarks and items that will require follow-up. These events can make great material for your newsletter or website. Please send copies/links to the [Pennsylvania Land Trust Association](#).

After the Event

Thank you

Send thank-you notes to your legislator and his/her staff members for making time for the event and any help they provided in the planning process. Make sure everyone you've worked with receives a thank you. You may use an electronic thank you, but, as with a paper note, make sure it is personal.

Follow Up with Staff

Call the legislator's staff to fill them in on what was said and begin to pursue any needed follow up, such as requests for further information. Send them pictures too.

Media Coverage

Bringing Your Event to the Next Level

Press coverage can provide an incentive for the legislator to agree to the site visit, raise the profile of your organization, and draw attention to the importance of conservation funding. Before you start planning for media coverage, talk to the staff member responsible for the legislator's public relations. Ask how you can work together to bring press to the event and best meet everyone's needs.

Media Alert

Media alerts are used to publicize events to the press ahead of time and serve as an invitation, encouraging reporters to attend and giving them sufficient notice to schedule their attendance.

The media alert should be brief, no more than 300-400 words. Use an attention-grabbing first paragraph that summarizes your event. Clearly identify all of the event details (what the event is, who will be participating, why it is important, and where and when it will take place it is).

The ConservationTools.org library contains a [general media alert template](#) that you can adapt to create your own.

Contacting Reporters

Make a list of your local newspapers, tv news outlets, radio and online news outlets. Don't forget the growing number of online-only community news outlets. While news outlets will offer a general submission form or email address to send media advisories and press releases, establishing a personal connection with a reporter can make the difference in whether or not your story is covered. If possible, identify which reporters are most likely to be interested in the event. (This could be prefaced with a note explaining that you have seen their previous coverage and thought this story would interest them). Other organizations in your area may be able to provide you with a list of media contacts.

After you have sent the media advisory, call each reporter. Reporters can be inundated with press releases so making a follow up calls is very important. When you call, be sure to ask if it is a good time to talk, as they may be on a deadline. (The best times to call are between 10am and 2pm). Have a brief and simple story pitch ready, no more than 30 seconds long. Don't get bogged down in details. Tell the reporter when and what the event is, how it is unique, and why it is important to the community. Identify what you will be able to offer the reporter, such as community voices, unique perspectives, and data/statistics. Let them know that the state legislator will be there. If they are not personally interested in the story, ask if there is another reporter who might be.

Press Conference

Consider holding a brief press conference where you can describe how preserving the property you are visiting has benefited the community and the importance of state conservation funding as well as answer questions from the press. Prior to the press conference, you should choose a moderator, consider answers to questions that may be asked, and hold a rehearsal.

Preparing for the Press Conference

Moderator

The moderator will be responsible for convening the press conference, introducing the topics and speakers and keeping the remarks of each speaker brief. It is the role of the moderator to briefly summarize the key points of the speakers and then open sessions to questions. It is the moderator's job to call on each reporter and then either answer the question or direct them to the appropriate speaker.

Who Should Speak?

Although many people may want to share their points of view, you don't want an event where multiple people say the same thing, nor an event where too many messages are delivered. Decide on which messages you want to convey, and decide on the most

appropriate people to deliver them. Other allies and supporters can stand with the speakers during the event and be introduced as supporters. It is also important to invite volunteers, community members, and other supporters to be in the audience. A full audience lets the legislator know that conservation has wide support.

In most cases, the legislator will expect to be invited to speak or otherwise have the opportunity to engage with the reporters.

Questions and Answers

Consider possible questions and answers. If asked a question you cannot answer, don't be afraid to say you don't know and will get back to them later. A response to a misguided question might be "That's a good question, but it is not within the scope of this press conference. Our focus today is on..."

Rehearsal

A brief rehearsal will allow the speakers to be more prepared, avoid excessive redundancy and stay on message. If you cannot do this in person, think about going over the agenda on a conference call.

When Should it Be?

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays are considered to be the best days to hold a press conference because this is when reporters are most likely to be available, but during the weeks the [House](#) or [Senate](#) is in session, Monday through Wednesday generally won't work for the legislator. Mid to late morning tends to work well. Print reporters generally do not like early morning events and if the event is too late in the afternoon, they will have trouble meeting their deadlines.

At The Event

Highlight the Benefits to the Community

Give concrete, tangible examples of how the community has benefited from the land being conserved. Make the connections specific to the community and emphasize a personal component. Highlight how the state funding leveraged private, local and/or federal funding for this project.

Avoid conservation lingo. If reporters don't understand your language, they are likely to get it wrong when they craft their report.

Post Conference Interview

After the formal portion of the event, many reporters will want to conduct one-on-one interviews.

Press Packet

When journalists arrive, make sure they are each personally welcomed and given a press packet. Be sure to get their contact information. The press packet will include a copy of the [media alert](#), background information on the type of conservation funding used to preserve the site you are visiting, your contact information, information about the

preserved property where the event is being held and information about your organization.

Capturing the Event

Even with media in attendance, designate a staff or volunteer to take lots of pictures and take notes on the legislator's remarks and items that will require follow-up. If someone on your team has good videography skills, consider recording the event and uploading it to your Facebook page and/or your website. Please send copies/links to the [Pennsylvania Land Trust Association](#).

After the Event

Press Release

Send out a press release as soon as possible after the event. A press release is more comprehensive than a media alert. Reporters often take directly from press releases for their articles, making them extremely important. The news release should review highlights of the event and contain information about your land trust. It should include quotations from the legislator and the head of your organization, (executive director or board president), as well as authority figures (such as someone directly impacted by the land conservation work) to add authenticity and legitimacy to the release.

The recommendations for appropriate length of a press release vary. Generally speaking, they should be between 400-800 words. Your local news outlets may have their own length requirements.

You can customize this [press release template](#).

Media Follow Through

Call or email reporters who attended to see if they need more information. Make sure they received a copy of the press release. Reporters may have had to miss the conference at the last minute. This is the way it goes; you are competing with all the other news of the day. Don't worry. Send a press packet to these reporters soon after the conference and make yourself available for an interview. Include a photo or two from the event if you can.

If a journalist picks up your story, thank them. Tell them why it was important to your organization.

Organizational Communications

Post the release and photos on your web site and highlight the event on your social media outlets. Share these with the [Pennsylvania Land Trust Association](#).

Special Considerations During an Election Season

501(c)(3) organization are prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for

elective public office. This includes any action that endorses, or appears to endorse a candidate.

For more detailed information on 501(c)3 organizations and elections, see the guide "[Elections and 501\(c\)3 Organizations](#)" at ConservationTools.org.

Disclaimer

Nothing contained in this or any other document available at ConserveLand.org or ConservationTools.org is intended to be relied upon as legal advice. The authors disclaim any attorney-client relationship with anyone to whom this document is furnished. Nothing contained in this document is intended to be used, and cannot be used, for the purpose of (i) avoiding penalties under the Internal Revenue Code or (ii) promoting, marketing or recommending to any person any transaction or matter addressed in this document.

Acknowledgements

Elana Richman prepared this guide. Some of the information is based, with permission, on information presented by the Land Trust Alliance on their web page, *Meet with Congress Over Recess*, <http://www.landtrustalliance.org/policy/advocacy-tips/meet>.

The Pennsylvania Land Trust Association prepared this guide with support from the William Penn Foundation.

Disclaimer

Nothing contained in this or any other document available at ConserveLand.org or ConservationTools.org is intended to be relied upon as legal advice. The authors disclaim any attorney-client relationship with anyone to whom this document is furnished. Nothing contained in this document is intended to be used, and cannot be used, for the purpose of (i) avoiding penalties under the Internal Revenue Code or (ii) promoting, marketing or recommending to any person any transaction or matter addressed in this document.

Submit Comments and Suggestions

The Pennsylvania Land Trust Association would like to know your thoughts about this guide: Did we miss issues? Do any subjects need clarification or expansion? Other concerns? Please contact Andy Loza at 717-230-8560 or aloza@conserve-land.org with your thoughts. Thank you.

Planning a Site Visit with Your Legislator

Text may be excerpted and reproduced with acknowledgement of ConservationTools.org and the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association.